

WELCOMING MIGRANTS - P5 • ISRAEL'S DAY IN COURT - P18

INDYPENDENT

#285: FEBRUARY 2024

DAVID HOLLENBACH



JOURNEY TO CUBA

A CUBAN-AMERICAN SOCIALIST TRAVELS TO HIS HOMELAND FOR THE FIRST TIME

BY DANNY VALDES — P10

PALESTINE CINEMA

CO-HOSTED BY THE INDYPENDENT & STARR BAR

214 STARR ST. BROOKLYN

MOVIE SCREENINGS FOLLOWED BY DISCUSSION PANELS
FOR MORE SEE PAGE 19

= THU FEB 29 • 7PM =

= SAT MAR 23 • 7PM =

BORN IN GAZA

ISRAELISM





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FEBRUARY

THRU JULY 8 • MON–SAT 10AM–5:45PM • FREE
PHOTOGRAPHY: *THE WAY OF LANGSTON HUGHES*
Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes forged connections between creative professionals and helped build a larger network of Black creatives and intellectuals. Among them were Arna Bontemps, Zora Neale Hurston, Louis Armstrong and more. The photographs in this exhibition offer an intimate look at Hughes with students, writers, visual artists and performers in different periods of their maturation.
SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd
Manhattan

THU FEB 15 • 7PM–10PM
DOCUMENTARY: *FRANZ FANON: BLACK SKIN WHITE MASK*
Franz Fanon has been acclaimed for writing *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and for his professional life as a psychiatrist in Algeria during its war of independence against France. In Isaac Julien's *Franz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask*, interviews, reconstructions and archival footage tell the story of the life and work of the anti-colonialist writer. Discussion to follow screening. Part of Maysles Documentary Center's *Made in Harlem – The LaFargue Clinic Remixed* series curated by Kazembe Balagun. Tickets and more at www.maysles.org/calendar/black-skin-white-mask.
MAYSLES DOCUMENTARY CENTER
343 Malcolm X Blvd
Manhattan

SAT FEB 17 • \$7–\$10
DANCE PERFORMANCE: *FROM AFRICA TO THE DIASPORA*
Bronx Rising! Presents a musical and poetic exchange between Africa and the diaspora. Sidiki Conde, percussionist and dancer from Guinea, will perform, and youth poets from Urban World will recite their poetry to open the program.
BRONX MUSIC HERITAGE CENTER
1303 Louis Nine Blvd
Bronx

SUN FEB 18 • 11AM–12:30PM • FREE
HISTORY WALK: *BROOKLYN AND THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT*
Join the Urban Park Rangers on a walk discussing Brooklyn's significant role in the abolitionist movement in the United States. Registration is required at nycgov-parks.org.
BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK, PIER 1
150 Furman St
Brooklyn

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VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 7 Ave
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THEATER: *DOULA MONSTER*
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THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY CABARET THEATER
155 1st Ave
Manhattan

SUN FEB 25 • 1–2:30PM • FREE
TEACH IN: *HISTORIC BLACK WOMEN OF HARLEM*
Celebrate Black History Month with NYC Parks! Join the Urban Park Rangers and learn about some of the revolutionary Black women that have contributed to the thriving community of Harlem. For more, call 212-360-1444 or go to <https://rb.gy/u5r0k2>.
ST. NICHOLAS PARK
135th St & St Nicholas Ave
Manhattan

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LIFTING THE MASK: *Franz Fanon at the Maysles Documentary Center on Feb. 15..*

FEB 22–MAR 10 • THU, FRI & SAT 8PM; SUN 3PM • \$18

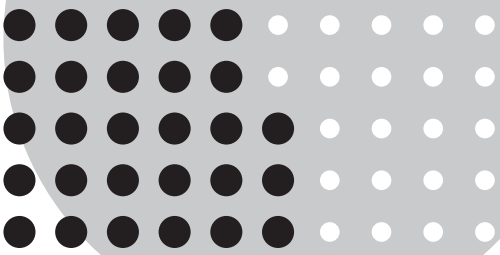
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226 Marcus Garvey Blvd.
Brooklyn

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FUND DRIVE UPDATE: HELP!



As THE INDY goes to press, we have raised \$28,197 in our winter fund drive – almost 60% of our goal of \$50,000. Many thanks to everyone who has donated. However, if this shortfall continues, we could be in dire financial straits by this summer. If you can give but haven't done so, please make a donation today.

INDYPENDENT.ORG
Check: 388 ATLANTIC AVE, 2ND FL BROOKLYN, NY 11217



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Amy Goodman



Juan González



Nermeen Shaikh

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BREAKING NEWS FROM 1741

BY THEODORE HAMM

Prior to Gov. Nelson Rockefeller's siege of the Attica prison in 1971, the events of 1741 were the largest single episode of deadly government-initiated violence in New York's history. Nearly three dozen people were executed, 30 of them Black. Scores more were deported.

Was New York's response to the alleged "slave conspiracy" the result of prosecutorial misconduct? A leading figure in the state's venerable ranks of criminal defense lawyers says so.

And he even filed a complaint with the state, albeit ineffectual commission on prosecutor misconduct, seeking posthumous accountability for prosecutors Joseph Murray and John Chambers, for whom streets in Lower Manhattan are named.

Russell Neufeld is a retired defense attorney best known for his work combatting death penalty cases brought by Brooklyn District Attorney Joe Hynes in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. He now devotes his time to writing about New York history. His complaint regarding Murray and Chambers appears in the Winter 2024 issue of Atticus, the newsletter of the New York State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

A series of fires broke out in the cold winter of 1741 in Lower Manhattan. The town's elite immediately suspected that enslaved people — estimated to comprise over one-sixth of New York City's local population of 11,000 — were the culprits.

Officials particularly targeted the goings-on at Hughson's Tavern, located just north of Trinity Church. Slaves were allowed to socialize alongside whites at the establishment. John Hughson, the proprietor, was also a fence for stolen goods. This was helpful for bondsmen, who were not permitted to possess money, causing them to barter with Hughson.

An indentured servant named Mary Burton, 16, worked at the tavern. Burton, who took offense at having to serve slaves, would become the prosecution's key witness.

STOLEN WEALTH: This 1730–40 map contains an inset of colonial New York surrounded by a number of figures, including a large group of enslaved Africans who are bringing goods to lay at the feet of the British king. Their presence indicates the significance of slavery to the economic success of British New York.

It was clear that many of the fires were intentionally set, as properties belonging to the elite — including enslaver Joseph Murray — had been targeted. But the motive was not clear, with one member of the Governor's Council asserting that larceny may have been the cause ("Villains prey on their neighbor's goods under pretense of assisting [by] removing them for security from the danger of the flames," he noted.)

Amid the outbreak of theft, Burton and another indentured servant, Arthur Price, went to jail on charges of theft. The two then hatched a plan that would gain favor from the town elite: They blamed the fires on bondsmen, including alleged ringleaders named Caesar and Prince. Burton claimed that the enslaved duo had concocted their plan during a Christmas meal at Hughson's Tavern.

Burton's statements set in motion a set of conspiracy cases brought by prosecutors Murray and Chambers, with Judge Daniel Horsmanden presiding. All three played up ties by enslaved defendants to the colony's Spanish rivals, and Neufeld argues that historians including Jill Lepore have given too much credence to false confessions elicited during the trials.

Burton's accusations proved pivotal for the prosecution, and her targets expanded to include Irish soldiers and an Irish schoolteacher. Robin, a bondsman owned by Chambers, was one of 13 burned at the stake (17 others went to the gallows). Hughson and his wife were also executed.

By the summer, Mary Burton started telling locals that "there was no plot." But the damage had been done and the scars would endure. Racial tensions simmered through the American Revolution, when many of New York's enslaved people fought for the British, who offered emancipation in exchange.

Neufeld explains that even by the standards of 1741, the actions of Murray and Chambers amounted to prosecutorial misconduct. Encouraging (aka "suborning") perjury was punishable by imprisonment at the time. Neufeld thus asks the current prosecutor misconduct commission to retroactively disbar Murray and Chambers.

As *The Independent* recently documented, action of any kind from the commission, dormant since its creation in 2021, would be a welcome surprise for the entity's creators. Meanwhile, the City Council should strongly consider renaming the two Lower Manhattan streets that honor bad prosecutors.



MIGRANT-ALUJAH!

THE EARTH CHXRCH THROWS OPEN ITS DOORS

By JOHN TARLETON

Gafar is a slender, soft-spoken man with a receding hairline and many sorrows etched in his face. He was formerly an animal herder who fled his home village in the Darfur region of Sudan after militia men murdered some of his family members and seized their home and animals.

In 2023 he set off for the United States, crossing several Central African countries before taking a plane first to Turkey and then to Brazil. There he resumed his overland travels, including a grueling hike through the Darien Gap, which separates South and Central America. At times he had to walk past the decaying corpses of fellow migrants who did not survive the trek. In November he crossed the border into Southern California.

Mahamat was a professional soccer player in his native Chad. He hopes to make a better life in the United States. “In Chad, the government does nothing for the people,” he says.

Mahamat followed a similar itinerary as Gafar, flying to Turkey and then to South America. His journey, he said, included seven days of walking across the desert in northern Mexico before entering Arizona in December.

Both men, who are seeking asylum, flew to New York City. They were initially placed in shelters only to be evicted under new City rules limiting shelter stays for migrant men to 30 days.

“Psychologically it’s very difficult to be moving around so much,” Gafar said.

The next step in their journeys would bring each of them to St. Brigid’s Church in the East Village to get on a waiting list for shelter beds.

Jess Beck was walking her dog at Tompkins Square Park in early January when she saw long lines of migrants outside St. Brigid’s waiting to get on the list. Like Gafar and Mahamat, they were mostly Africans. Beck, a documentary filmmaker, started speaking with the migrants and created an Instagram page, @meetyournewneighbors, to introduce them to her fellow East Villagers.

“These weren’t just people standing in line,” Beck said. “These were human beings with back stories and skills.”

As the winter weather worsened, Beck and a neighbor, Kathleen Keene, grew more concerned about the migrants’s plight. They put out a call for a meeting at the Earth Chxrch, a theater space on Avenue C that is the home base of Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir.

Thirty East Village residents turned out on Jan. 7 for the first meeting of what would become East Village Neighbors Who Care, an ad-hoc network of local residents. The group formed several working groups and started a GoFundMe page that raised \$8,000 for EV Loves, a volunteer kitchen that serves meals to the migrants in Tompkins Square Park three days a week.

A few days later, Reverend Billy Talen — an anti-capitalist performance artist who is a fake preacher at a fake church that acts more like a real church than most churches — suggested opening the Earth Chxrch and making it a welcoming center for the migrants.

“My first thought was that it would be a really big undertaking,” Beck said. “My second thought was, ‘What the hell, let’s do it.’”

• • •

THE EARTH CHXRCH OPENED ITS DOORS as a welcoming center on Monday, Jan. 15, and remains open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. while Reverend Billy and the choir, of which Beck is a member, continue to stage their Sunday performances.

EAGER TO LEARN: French-speaking African migrants participate in a language class at the Earth Chxrch welcoming center.

GAFAR: Traveled from Sudan to New York City in search of safety and work.

ALL ONE: Reverend Billy Talen of the Earth Chxrch.

Housed in a former Capital One bank branch building, the Earth Chxrch offers a tantalizing glimpse of what life beyond capitalism might be like. Colorfully-drawn vines crawl up once-said columns in the middle of the space. The names of trans victims of police violence are listed on the wall behind where bank tellers used to work.

On a cold, dreary Friday afternoon in early February, around 100 migrants packed into the space. Some gathered in small groups and chatted quietly among themselves while others attended an English language class led by a volunteer teacher or watched an African soccer match on their phones. At one point, donated backpacks were given to migrants who didn’t have one.

Hanging over the middle of the room was a banner that read, “unperturbed in the face of the inexplicable.”

“They welcome you here. They give you food. They give you coffee. You can rest,” Mahamat said. “This is the best place I’ve been, because the people don’t act like police.”

“A lot of people we see did not have a bed to sleep in the night before,” Beck said.

Opening up the Earth Chxrch, she said, also met the needs of East Village residents who were eager to be of help.

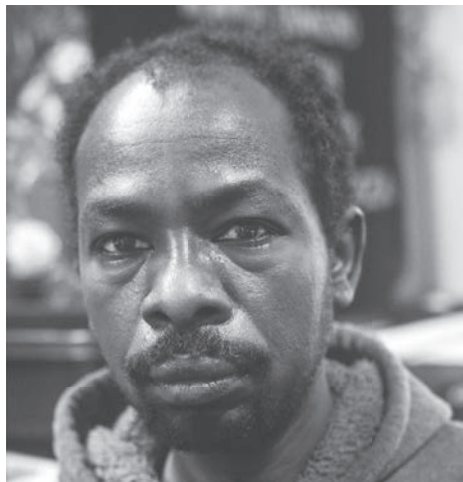
Within days, Beck told *The Independent*, 100 volunteers were helping obtain and distribute food while 50 volunteers helped procure and distribute clothes. Groups of translators speaking French, Spanish and Arabic were formed. Working groups to assist the migrants with their legal cases and arranging visits to friendly doctors also took shape. And the Earth Chxrch has launched a second GoFundMe page that has raised more than \$10,000 to help defray expenses.

“My mind is blown at the speed with which we’ve set up something so big and that is helping so many people,” Beck said.

“This reminds me of Zuccotti Park,” Reverend Billy said, recalling the 2011 birthplace of Occupy Wall Street that buzzed with activity during its two-month existence. “The East Village,” he added, “is repudiating Mayor Adams’ Trumpian scapegoating of immigrants and reminding us of the New York that welcomes immigrants.”

As *The Indy* goes to press, no other space in the East Village has opened its doors as a welcoming center, the City’s response to the migrant influx continues to be lethargic at best. The federal government, with its almost boundless resources, is hamstrung by congressional Republicans who refuse to approve additional funds for beleaguered big cities like New York that are controlled by Democrats. Meanwhile, the Earth Chxrch’s success in serving migrants is also creating new strains. Word about the space is spreading in the migrant community, and the volunteers have had to reluctantly enforce their own border controls.

“We are finding more and more people are arriving earlier and earlier to ensure they get a spot, so the lines are getting longer,” Beck said. “People are in desperate need of the minimal services we provide.”





KEATING ZELENKE

ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS WOMAN WELCOMES MIGRANT FAMILY OF FOUR INTO HER APARTMENT

BY KEATING ZELENKE

In the center of Laura Kaplan's living-room floor, 10-year-old Zoe draws with colored pencils while her younger brother, 8-year-old Hector, drives toy cars around an imaginary track on the hardwood. Occasionally, Hector pops up and finds the lap of his mother, Elba, who is sitting on the couch against the wall. The children's father, Allan, watches on from a chair across the room — which is only four or five feet away considering how compact the space is.

"We were supposed to cross the river and walk straight [to Tapachula]," Allan explains as he pulls up satellite images of the Guatemalan city Tecún Umán and a wide, muddy river. He and Elba take turns telling the story of how they traveled from their native San Pedro Sula in Honduras to New York City. Their family is among the more than 100,000 asylum seekers that have come to the city since April 2022.

Allan has reached the most perilous part of their trip: crossing the Suchiate River, which flows along the border of Guatemala and Mexico. The river itself is shallow, but the market for transporting migrants across — run by various gangs — is full of potential wrong turns. Elba comes around and shows everyone a photo that she took of the makeshift rafts: long wooden planks strapped over two inner tubes of tractor tires. They look not unlike the kind of tubes you might see a family here in the United States attach to the back of their boat for a nice day at the lake.

Laura Kaplan, a bilingual education professor at Pace University, is one of a small group of New Yorkers who have opened their doors to migrants seeking shelter. Seated at the dining table, she listens intently as Allan relays their journey. On the Mexican side of the Suchiate, the family had a close call with the cartel. In Mexico City, they struggled to schedule an appointment with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, using the American-made CBP One app, which was frequently disrupted due to the volume of migrants trying to process asylum claims. At their final stop in Mexico — Reynosa, a border town across from McAllen in southeastern Texas — they waited a week for their customs appointment to arrive. That

week in Reynosa was the second-most dangerous point in their travels.

"The receptionist [at our hotel] said that the kids can't leave for any reason," Allan said in Spanish.* The cartel, the hotel staff explained, would go through their guestbook to find families to extort. As a result, Allan and Elba were listed as an elderly couple in the hotel's records. The children were left out completely.

Allan finishes the story by showing a photo of Zoe and Hector sitting against the chain-link fence of the Reynosa-McAllen border-crossing bridge. It was taken on a sunny day over the Rio Grande, and Zoe's long black hair is blowing around in the light breeze. The two kids throw up peace signs to the camera, their roughly three-month migration coming to an end.

During the pauses in our conversation, the sound of Zoe's pencil sharpener fills the space. She loves artwork and later on shows off two paintings of snowy landscapes she made. Zoe and Hector — whose head is now propped up on a blanket while he lies on the floor watching a video on someone's phone — saw their first snow during the storm that blanketed the city in early January.

A little while after Allan and Elba finish telling their story, Kaplan reflects on what she's heard. Not one to pry, she says quietly, almost to herself, that despite the family living in her apartment for the past four months, she knew few of the details about their journey.

AN OLD FRIEND

Allan and Elba's family did not come to Laura's home by blind chance. Though they had never met nor spoken to her prior to crossing the border, the family and Laura were connected through a crucial link: Allan's mother, Elda, who passed away in April 2021, was Kaplan's close friend.

For nearly two years, Elda, also originally from Honduras, lived in this same brightly-colored Washington Heights apartment with Laura while she received cancer treatment in New York. There is a photo of her on a bookshelf in the living room, smiling over her shoulder as she cuts a small cluster of red grapes from the vine.

OPEN HOUSE: (From left) Laura Kaplan with Elba and Allan and their two children, Hector and Zoe.

"Elda was a beautiful, beautiful person," Laura says, remembering her friend. "We did everything together."

While she was staying with Laura, Elda told her about her family back in Honduras, about her husband's furniture-building business and how their six children were put to work to help their father at a young age. Elda

called her daughter and granddaughter on the phone nearly every day. Laura chatted with them sometimes as well, though she never spoke with Elda's middle son, Allan, the university graduate who was not afraid to speak his mind about corruption in the Honduran government.

"I was taught that you can learn from criticism," Allan said, explaining his inclination towards activism. "I always expressed what I thought was wrong so it could be improved. But it's never taken that way in politics." Allan's first cousin is also an outspoken journalist in Honduras, making the family even more vulnerable to threats and harassment from the government.

"[Elda] was always worried and expressed her concern because Allan was publishing things on Facebook, and she thought he could get in trouble for that," Laura said.

At one point, the family's home was broken into, but nothing was stolen. To Allan, this was a clear sign of government surveillance and one of the reasons he felt he and his family had to flee Honduras, though they wouldn't leave until March of 2023, nearly two years after Elda died.

Allan and his wife and children were initially staying in Austin, Texas, with his sister, who had emigrated to the country a little while before him. When Kaplan found out that some of Elda's family had moved to the United States, she flew down to meet them, just to "check in."

"I had no intention of bringing anyone back with me whatsoever," she remembered, a hint of light-hearted irony in her voice. However, in Austin she found that the family's living conditions left something to be desired. Not only was the city difficult to navigate without a car, but between the two siblings and their families, there were 11 people crammed into a two-bedroom apartment.

"I thought that even my very, very modest apartment — with one bedroom — in New York City would be a much better living circumstance for the children," Laura said. So when Allan asked if they could go back to New York City with her and the end of her trip down south, Kaplan said yes.

Continued on page 16



COURTESY

BOE VS DSA STATE ELECTION AUTHORITIES TARGET SOCIALIST GROUP

BY THEODORE HAMM

En route to her \$53 million fundraising haul in 2022, Gov. Kathy Hochul raked in scores of then-maximum contributions of \$69,800. Just a handful of those top-dollar donations from casino magnates, luxury condo developers and their ilk exceeded the total amount brought in by DSA for the Many, an entity that raised money for 13 candidates for the state legislature that year.

The Democratic Socialists' support in that cycle came from 1,800 people, with a median donation of roughly \$50. It's a safe bet that these small-dollar donors knew they were contributing to a pool of resources that would be used to support multiple campaigns in the 2022 election.

The group's social media pages in mid-2022 called it a "Multi Candidate Committee supporting socialists across New York." Their feeds circulated support for various members of the DSA's slate, eight of whom won their elections.

In order to accept money, the group needed to first register with the state Board of Elections. The board's compliance team did not flag any missing requirements before approving DSA for the Many's official status for the 2022 campaign.

Now, as the group prepares for the 2024 elections, the BoE is trying to impose a severe fine on DSA for the Many because of paperwork the board now says was required in 2022. That move contradicts the board's own advice to the group two years ago.

To a lay person, this may sound absurd. But New York election law routinely defies common sense.

According to the BoE, the DSA fundraising entity failed to provide sworn state-

FOR THE MANY: NYC-DSA's 2022 candidate slate.

ments from each of the candidates agreeing to receive funds from the pool. DSA for the Many's treasurer, Devin McManus, signed paperwork declaring that was the group's intent.

In late May 2022, an election law compliance consultant working for the DSA asked the BoE if the individual statements were necessary for multi-candidate committees (the BoE's handbook was unclear). The response from the BoE stated that the treasurer's completed form was sufficient.

Late last year, a hearing officer ruled in the BoE's favor, arguing that the DSA needed the candidates' sworn statements and that it thus should have ignored the advice from the BoE. The officer then imposed a fine of over \$300k on McManus, exempting the candidates involved.

In order to enforce the fine, the BoE brought the case to an Albany judge, Roger McDonough. A ruling could come in late March. The appellate division will then decide whether to let McDonough's decision stand. And NY's highest court may ultimately hear the case.

Michael L. Johnson, the BoE's chief enforcement counsel responsible for the lawsuit (along with underling James Barron), is a product of the Harlem Democratic machine and a Cuomo appointee. In reporting about the case, the NY Times quoted Jerry Goldfeder, a longtime Cuomo family insider, who dutifully insisted that the BoE's charges were not "small potatoes."

"Why is a small-donor fundraising group such a threat?" asks Jeremy Cohan of the DSA's New York chapter. "There should be more attention to straw donors and dark money at all levels."

Cohan notes that DSA-backed Assemblymember Emily Gallagher has been fighting for transparency in LLC campaign donations, which Gov. Hochul continues to thwart. He also highlights the BoE's lax record of enforcement against campaigns that do not file required disclosure reports.

But with eight socialists currently serving in the state legislature and DSA backing challenges to three more incumbent Assemblymembers in this year's Democratic primary, Goliath fears David. And the behemoth will use whatever weapons it can to repel the challenger, including small potatoes.

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

NY SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY PROPOSED

Two state legislators introduced a bill Feb. 6 to create a state Social Housing Development Authority, "a public-benefit corporation to increase the supply of permanently affordable housing." Assemblymember Emily Gallagher (D-Brooklyn) and state Sen. Cordell Cleare (D-Manhattan) said in a statement that the authority could "create and preserve beautiful, sustainable, and democratically-controlled homes for New Yorkers, built with union labor." Around 9% of New York City's housing stock is already decommodified, including Co-op City in the East Bronx, Penn South in Chelsea and units built under the state Mitchell-Lama program from 1955 to 1978. State subsidies for private developers have failed, Cleare and Gallagher said. While private development added roughly 175,000 units between 2017 and 2021, almost all of them were high-rent: The city's vacancy rate is more than 12% for apartments that rent for over \$2,300 a month and less than 1% those under \$1,500.

CITY COUNCIL OVERRIDES ADAMS VETOES ON SOLITARY, POLICE STOPS

The City Council voted 42-9 Jan. 30 to override Mayor Eric Adams' vetoes of two bills, one to ban city jails from keeping prisoners in solitary confinement and another to expand when police have to report basic information about people they stop, such as their race, age and gender. Police currently only have to report that information about "Level 3" stops of people reasonably suspected of a crime. The How Many Stops Act extends that to Level 2 stops, based on a "founded suspicion," and Level 1 stops, which don't require any specific suspicion. Adams objected to including Level 1 stops, saying that would take too much of officers' time. Both bills will take effect in July, but whether the Adams administration will enforce them is uncertain.

COLUMBIA PRO-PALESTINE STUDENTS ENDURE CHEMICAL ATTACK

NOT A COMMODITY:

Housing activists are calling on New York State to invest in building more social housing, like Penn South in Chelsea (pictured above), a 15-building limited-equity cooperative apartment complex with 2,820 units that opened in 1962.



As *The Independent* goes to press, the NYPD nor Columbia University have charged two Israeli students who on Jan. 19 attacked a Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) on-campus rally, spraying them with an illegal chemical that left eight protesters hospitalized and dozens affected with symptoms of nausea, fatigue, burning eyes and skin rashes. Layla, one of the many Palestinian-American students at the rally, said the "skunk" spray "smelled like somebody just died." Israeli researchers developed skunk spray in 2004 to attack Palestinian demonstrators without using open fire. Columbia SJP says it identified two of the perpetrators as former Israeli soldiers "wearing fake keffiyehs." Columbia initially scolded the SJP organizers for holding an "unsanctioned" rally (the university banned local SJP and Jewish Voice for Peace chapters in November) and has since said the two suspected student attackers are barred from campus while police investigate. SJP and other pro-Palestine groups have led protests at and in front of Columbia's campus since the incident and vow to continue.

DENIALS OF CASH-AID APPLICATIONS SURGE

Applications for City cash aid have risen dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic — and the number denied has doubled. The Department of Social Services received 515,710 such applications in the fiscal year ending Oct. 1, 67% more than four years before, but rejected 287,280, twice as many as four years earlier. Almost half the denials were for failing to complete an interview, attributed to the City's switch in 2020 from in-person interviews to an electronic telephone system. "I tried for months to get in contact," a Brooklyn substitute teacher who was seeking a "One Shot Deal" to cover \$19,000 in back rent he'd run up during the pandemic told *City Limits*. The number of applications for cash aid processed within 30 days fell from 82.3% in the 2021-22 fiscal year to 28.8% in 2022-23, and the City has cut the budget lines for workers handling public assistance from 3,172 employees in 2022 down to 2,657.



COURTESY

MAKING THE SALE

DEPARTMENT STORE WORKER PITCHES SOCIALIST SOLUTIONS IN BID FOR BROOKLYN ASSEMBLY SEAT

BY JOHN TARLETON

“I can’t just sit around and not be active,” says Eon Tyrell Huntley, a department-store worker, rent-stabilized tenant and former PTA president at his daughters’ elementary school. Now he’s running as a socialist for State Assembly District 56 in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a Brooklyn neighborhood that has experienced waves of gentrification over the past 20 years.

Huntley’s political trajectory is similar to that of many millennials who voted for Barack Obama in 2008 and then moved to the left as they became increasingly disenchanted with a political and economic system that was stacked against them. Endorsed by the New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, Huntley is looking to join a contingent of eight socialist state legislators currently serving in Albany, including his state senator, Jabari Brisport. Huntley’s opponent in the June 25 Democratic primary, Stephani Zinerman, is a two-term incumbent backed by wealthy real-estate and charter-school interests.

THE INDYPENDENT: *Tell us about your district and why you are running for State Assembly.*

EON TYRELL HUNTLEY: Assembly District 56 is 77% renters in a community that’s experienced its share of evictions. We also have older and second-generation homeowners who are at risk of being foreclosed on. People need to be able to stay where they are. That’s why I support the good-cause eviction bill that would provide protection for tenants who have none. My opponent is actively working against that. And so in this time when people need some real support, particularly when it comes to housing, I can’t just sit around and not be active.

Talk about being a parent with school-aged children and a PTA president. How will it inform your approach to education and any other related issues up there that parents would be concerned about?

My kids go to a neighborhood school. My wife was a teacher for 18 years. I understand the amazing talent in our public schools, but they just lack the resources and support. As a PTA president, I’ve dealt with having to fundraise money to have additional tablets for students or printers for the teachers.

I have student loans to pay. My daughters are 10 and seven, and if we continue on this trajectory, I can’t even imagine how unaffordable college will become. We need a fully-funded and supported CUNY and SUNY. CUNY had free tuition up until the mid-1970s. To win that back, we just need to tax the rich.

Tell us about your current job.

I sell on commission at a high-end department store. I clock in, and I work from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. I stand up all day. Clients may walk in and I interact with them. I do client outreach as well. I also manage a brand where I oversee the shop. So I do merchandising and support other associates in their selling endeavors. I will take a break from my job in May and June to focus full-time on my campaign.

Before this I was a designer. It’s part of my radicalization — in terms of my politics, in terms of experiencing a lot of the shortcomings that this capitalist world has created. The fashion industry seems very glamorous, but it has no real worker protections. People work long hours. And then they have no real job security.

Why are you running as a Democratic Socialist instead of as a regular Democrat?

I’ve been a registered Democrat since high school and a dues-paying DSA member since 2018. There have been many times when I felt disheartened by politicians and their representation. When Bernie ran in 2016, that was an illuminating moment — all the failures of capitalism that I and so many others had internalized as our own were actually the fault of the system that was arrayed against us. Hearing someone speak to those things and also seeing how receptive people were was my opening into really looking into socialism.

I find that being a socialist speaks truly to my core, my politics — what I believe. And so I’m not really afraid to embrace that and say it. I think most people also support these policies, but they sometimes just hear “socialism” and shy away from it. It’s important to de-stigmatize that word.

Many leaders of Brooklyn’s Democratic establishment dismiss DSA as a bunch of white gentrifiers who are an alien presence in central Brooklyn.

Many organizations are made up of lots of white people. It’s not just the DSA. It’s also the Democratic Party. Meanwhile, in recent years Central Brooklyn voters have chosen socialists like Senator Jabari Brisport and Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest, both native New Yorkers and people of color, to represent them in the state legislature.

I think the establishment is afraid of a politics that really speaks to people. It’s out of touch on so many things. Look at their response to the war on Gaza. DSA is tapped into that and really has an opportunity to grow.

BED-STUY GUY: *Eon Tyrell Huntley is a socialist running for Assembly District 56 in Bedford-Stuyvesant.*

What do you make of the recent New York State Board of Elections ruling that says the DSA filed incorrect paperwork in the 2022 election cycle and seeks to impose a \$300,000 fine? Are you concerned this will cripple your campaign?

I think this is reflective of the byzantine structure of the Board of Elections. And I think that the establishment sees DSA as a threat, so they will use every kind of trick or formality to cripple this organization, its message and its agenda. But I’m confident things will resolve themselves. And if the fine holds, I think that it will just make DSA more defiant, because it becomes a situation where it’s really clear that it is being targeted.

The way my campaign is structured, we have a strong team. And I’m working to raise money — \$32,000 so far — so I’m confident we will continue to do what it takes to win.

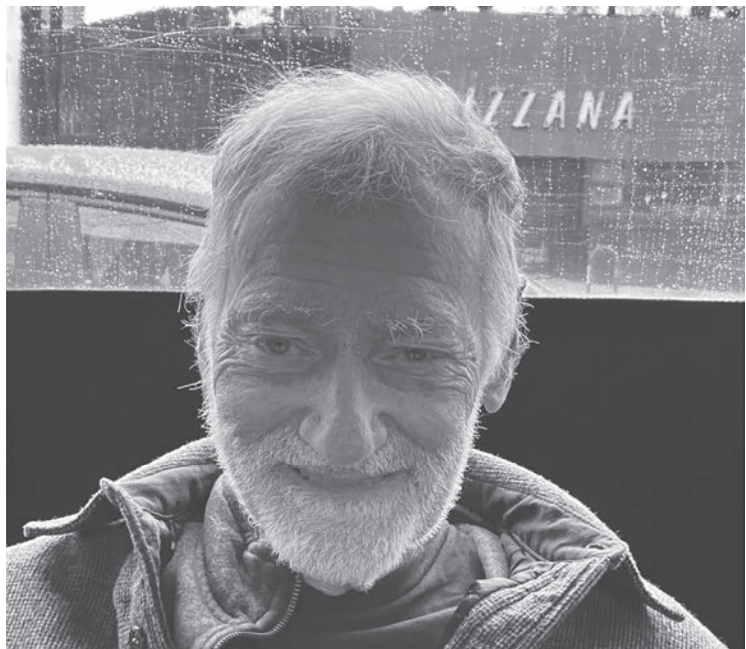
Given that you’re running for a state legislature seat in Albany, why do you believe it’s important to be speaking out on Palestine, instead of ducking that issue to focus exclusively on local matters?

I am very focused on the issues at hand for my would-be constituents. At the same time, as a socialist and as a person of color, I think this really matters. And I would say that most people of color, like my family, my friends — when this is a topic that’s brought up, we share the same sentiment.

It’s very important to have moral clarity. I think DSA and other socialists have that. As we talk about social justice, these things are all tied together. It may not necessarily be a part of my purview as an Assembly member in terms of having a say on foreign policy, but I do think it’s important in this time to be speaking on what’s right. So when that time comes, I don’t shy away from that.



LANE DIBLER



NANCY FROMER



ANIBA GUERGUERIAN



COURTESY

SPREAD THE NEWS

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

Met some of the volunteers who are helping *The Independent* reach a multi-racial, working-class audience that spans the city.

NANETTE WHETSTONE

Soundview, Bronx

I first came across *The Independent* at WBAI when I went there to pick up a premium. That was five or six years ago. I've been reading the paper ever since.

And now, I help distribute it in three different libraries in my community and in the laundry room in my apartment building.

I want to share what I'm learning from *The Independent*. I learn so much about how people are responding to all the inequalities — to all the racism, sexism and homophobia. And the writing is so good. I get the meat of what people are feeling. When I have conversations with people who don't read press like *The Independent*, I feel like I'm getting such total misinformation.

I feel honored to be able to share the paper. When I recently went to the laundry room, I put six papers down. I forgot something I had to go get upstairs. I came right back down, and there were two papers left. So that was nice to see.

LEW FRIEDMAN

Park Slope, Brooklyn

I'm a New Yorker. I was born and raised here. I used to distribute underground newspapers in the East Village in the early 1970s. I also used to read the old *Guardian* newspaper for many years before it crashed in the early 1990s. *The Independent* is following in the footsteps of papers like that.

I've been helping out for years as a box steward. I make sure their boxes on Fifth and Seventh avenues stay tidy and have a display copy in the window. When a box gets low, I have extra bundles at my house that I use to restock it. I also drop off the paper at venues in Park Slope where people know me.

I go to the Park Slope Food Co-op regularly. You can't put papers out in the co-op, but I always have a few extra copies in my backpack. When I see friends, I make sure they get one. I also take the paper to protests to hand out. People appreciate it, because it gives them the information they want.

MAHMOUD KASIM

Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

I grew up in Jerusalem before coming to New York in 1998. As a young man, I worked in a restaurant at the entrance of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The owner was hard on me when I didn't do my job well. But without that sting, I wouldn't be able to make my falafel the way I do today.

I have an *Independent* newsbox in front of my business because it's important to have this kind of newspaper. In New York City, all of the media is with the Israeli side. Thank God we have people who really show who are the Palestinians.

We are here. We are New Yorkers — God forbid if anything happened here in New York, I'd be in the first line. Why are we not seen? Why are our names not published?

When we say, "Free, free Palestine!" it's like

they want to ban that. But, that's freedom of speech. We have to get our voices out; people have got to read and know. You are not going to see the articles that are in *The Independent* anywhere else, not in *The New York Times* — none of that.

HANK DOMBROWSKI

Soho

I'm an artisanal woodworker and a rent-stabilized tenant who builds things like furniture, tables and bookshelves for people's homes. My dad worked at a bearing factory in New Britain, Connecticut, and belonged to a union. I remember when he and the other workers would go on strike. My mom was a nurse in a hospital who was hunched over well before retirement from lifting so many patients. This bred an interest in me wanting to know what's going on with the working class.

When I first came across *The Independent* more than 20 years ago, I felt like I was getting more accurate information, and I liked that it was local. I also liked that *The Indy* was not interested in maintaining a docile population of readers.

With the mainstream media, no matter what station you watch or newspaper you pick up, the ways they frame issues seem the same: the stock market went up so the economy is doing great; the U.S. government bombs other countries because we're fighting for freedom; protesters are annoying troublemakers who deserve whatever the cops do to them. I want media that goes to people who are actually experiencing the issues and talks to them. And *The Indy* is really good at that.

I've been an *Indy* box steward in my neighborhood since 2018. I also take papers to the bookstore and the library nearby. I think it's good to do whatever you can to support organizations that are fighting for your beliefs.

Over the past couple years, I've been fixing up *Indy* news boxes that have been damaged or tagged with stickers and graffiti. For graffiti, I use lacquer-based cleaners or acetone. For stickers, I use solvents to dissolve the glue that binds the stickers to the box. To prevent future problems, I put silicone on the windows to make it harder for stickers to stick. I also want to experiment with waterproof axle grease.

I'll fix boxes on the spot when I can. If they need more work, I'll take them up to my workshop in Connecticut. When I put a refurbished box back on the street, it says, "We're here. This newspaper is for all of us. And we're not going away."

To become a neighborhood box steward, to join our box-repair working group or to help with delivering the paper, email contact@indypendent.org or call (917) 426-4856. To help us keep printing papers we can distribute, go to www.indypendent.org/donate.

CUBA'S CONTRADICTIONS

FINDING HOPE AND HEARTBREAK AS THE SOCIALIST ISLAND FACES AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

BY DANNY VALDES

As a first-generation Cuban American who grew up in Miami, Cuba was a place I had long wanted to see with my own eyes, a place that had taken on a mystical quality, shrouded in the fog of immigrant stories, at once a paradise and a prison.

But I didn't quite know how to feel when I saw the email that I had been accepted to participate in a Democratic Socialists of America delegation to Cuba that took place in October. I knew this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit “*mi patria*,” but I also had to wrestle with the immense weight of my family's history of grief and grievance around the island and its government.

My parents were not thrilled about me traveling there, especially with a group of socialist organizers. But I asked them to write out what they remembered about Cuba and the circumstances of their leaving; they sent pages and pages of writing, and I was so thankful. I learned new parts of their stories and about the complexity of their feelings around the subject.

The victory of the Cuban Revolution came with its price — as do all major political upheavals and revolutions. In the case of my family, it came with the price of my paternal grandfather being jailed for six years by the nascent revolutionary government. It came with the price of my paternal grandmother having to flee the island with her husband in jail and three kids in tow, not knowing if she would ever see him again. On my mother's side, it came with the price of my grandmother waiting in long lines for food and not knowing whether there would be enough to feed my mother consistently. For my family and many hundreds of thousands of others, the reality of the revolution did not live up to its promises.

I have long since fallen out of step with my family's views of Cuba. Still, while it is certainly true that the reactionary politics of first-wave Cuban immigrants like my grandmother are fueled by class grievance, there is also real, raw generational trauma there. I did not directly experience having to leave the only place I knew, the only language I knew, my friends, my family, my school, my community, but it is a trauma I nonetheless inherited. It was in the air as thick as the Miami humidity — in stories on the Spanish language news, in conversations overheard at the grocery store, in the old photos taped onto my grandmother's living room walls.

Above everything else, this trip recommitted me

to the need to end the decades-long U.S. blockade on Cuba. This is a policy that causes nothing but desperation and hardship on the island. I saw first-hand its many effects, beyond even what government officials would describe to us. Life in Cuba is difficult, and many times more so since Trump reinvigorated the embargo and the worldwide economic turmoil of the pandemic wreaked havoc on an already-fragile economy. What I also saw in Cuba was a vibrant culture of solidarity, a people of incredible warmth and resilience, a government that was trying and failing in significant ways to cope with modern realities, and yet a government that was trying.

I was left in awe of how much Cuba manages to do with so little, and how little we in the United States manage to do with so much. It is a place full of contradictions — great hope and great heartbreak, wrapped up and intertwined.

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

We were told to leave our phones on the bus as we pulled up to el Palacio de la Revolución, Cuba's rough equivalent to the White House. The building stands proudly at the end of the Plaza de Revolución, alongside the famous ministerial buildings with the faces of Cuba's revolutionary heroes emblazoned on their facades. After the revolution, the Plaza became the place where hundreds of thousands of Cubans from around the country would often gather to hear Fidel Castro give notoriously-long speeches where he would lay out his plans for the country. Since Fidel's passing and his brother Raul's retirement, it has been void of its once vibrant rallies and speeches.

We entered the Palacio de la Revolución and went through a metal detector, then up a short set of stairs to a place known as el Salón de los Helechos, the Hall of Ferns. The walls and doors — seemingly every vertical surface — were covered in various subspecies of ferns and mosses. Stout palms and bushes grew from inlaid garden beds. It was later explained to us that the plants are all the kinds that grow in Cuba's Sierra Maestra, the mountain range on Cuba's eastern end where Fidel Castro and his rag-tag group of revolutionaries landed in 1956 to kick off the armed struggle that would see Castro become the island's president, prime minister, commander-in-chief, secretary general and first secretary of the country's only political party over the course of his nearly 50 years in power. Cuba's current presi-



DANNY VALDES



LORNA PEREZ



DANNY VALDES

dent, the man who greeted us in the same halls Fidel once walked, is a very different man.

His name is Miguel Díaz-Canel. He is tall and built, with slicked-back white hair and (notably in this context) a clean-shaven face. He wore a suit, not the iconic green military fatigues of the Castros. He spoke in the quiet, confident tone of a bureaucrat. This is a man who is symbolic of a new era for Cuba and also a man trying to follow in the footsteps of a larger-than-life figure who was the glue holding the country's politics together — an impossible balance to strike. The most prominent poster we saw of Díaz-Canel featured his face placed in a line with Fidel and Raul Castro, with big red letters across the bottom that spelled “*Somos continuidad*,” or “we are continuity.”

President Díaz-Canel spent just over two hours with us. A few members of our delegation gave prepared statements about our socialist solidarity with Cuba and about how honored we were to be invited to have this conversation. I have to stress it was a big accomplishment for our delegation that this meeting took place. It was a sign that the Cuban government takes our organization seriously and sees us as potential partners in the work of ending the U.S. blockade.

Díaz-Canel began his remarks in a surprising way: “Cuba is not perfect.” He described his government as trying to do something for which there is no guidebook: constructing a socialist state while under the weight of an economic blockade. Cuba is in a near-unprecedented economic crisis which it is still struggling to recover from, a crisis that has caused nearly half a million Cubans to leave the island in the last few years. This crisis fell on Díaz-Canel in 2019, the year he became socialist Cuba's first leader that does not have the last name Castro.

That same year Donald Trump announced he was reimposing a slew of sanctions and restrictions that had been loosened under the Obama administration. In fact, over the course of his presidency, Trump would not only “cancel” any and all “relaxing” of sanctions that had occurred under Obama, but he would go on to impose hundreds of new sanctions and restrictions on Cuba that targeted everything from travel to remittances, to medical cooperation, to even affecting Cuba's ability to do business with international banks and businesses. And then, the *coup de grâce* — just days before Trump's term ended in 2021, he added Cuba back to the State Department's “State Sponsors of Terrorism” list, which stipulates additional limitations on finances and goods.

This reinvigorated blockade has an undeniable, visible effect on Cuba and its people. We saw it in long lines for fuel, in cargo ships anchored offshore waiting for financial transactions to clear the legal maze of sanction law, and in more acute circumstances, like the severe restrictions faced by Cuba's medical system. According to the UN, “from 1 March 2022 to 28 February 2023, the blockade cost Cuba an estimated \$4.87 billion in losses, an amount that comes to \$133 million dollars a day.”

Díaz-Canel said to us, “No other country has to operate under such conditions. Vietnam and China are not under blockade, and are able to develop their approach to socialism.” The blockade has indeed created a situation unique to Cuba in both the way it has worked to strangle the Cuban economy but also in the way it has shaped Cuba by isolating it from foreign capital. Would Cuba be as committed to its vision of socialism had American capital been allowed to wield its influence and create its oligarchs on the island? It's a double-edged question to ponder. We have the example of China to see what a hyper-capitalized “communism” looks like. What then, is socialism with Cuban characteristics?

Socialism in Cuba lacks the consumerist flair of China. It is more down to earth, resourceful and neighborly. These properties define it both because of and in despite of the material conditions created by the embargo. In a society where resources are made scarce, shared responsibility and neighborly cooperation become not just an ideal but a necessity. The embargo has forged and reinforced an ethos of shared reliance that is an essential part of the Cuban socialist identity.

At an elementary school we visited, I noticed a focus on learning about community, being good neighbors, revolutionary solidarity and a commitment to doing community service work — the dreaded collectivism of communism.

If the embargo comes to an end, socialism in Cuba is going to necessarily be different than it is today. By the same token, if the embargo continues to pummel the economy and create misery on the island, it is entirely possible that Cuba will succumb to reactionary pressure and the socialist experiment will be over. Many people who visit Cuba remark that it feels like a place stuck in time, but it is at an unprecedented rupture point.

This fundamental fact is the reason that the Cuban government is desperate to create a connection between Díaz-Canel and the Castros. If the socialist project is to successfully navigate this rupture, the Cuban government needs legitimacy first and foremost.

I believe that President Díaz-Canel and his government understand that the Cuba of the last 65 years is dead. Their work toward ending the embargo, bringing foreign investment capital to the island and growing Cuba's fledgling private sector are all signs of this. Díaz-Canel and several of his colleagues stressed time and time again that Cuba must adapt. In his speech, he laid out the goals of his government: control inflation, support the most economically-vulnerable, engage in neighborhood transformation and consultation, develop scientific pursuits that can be freely shared with the public, and implement the newly-passed family code, which legalized same-sex marriage and supports equal rights within families. He said, “Our goal is emancipation and social justice, not economic growth for its own sake.”

The president closed his remarks to us by lauding the Cuban people's capacity for “creative resilience and resistance.”

Cuba, famous for being a place frozen in time, feels like it's at an inflection point that could be as significant as the one that led to the revolution's triumph in 1959. Regardless of where it ends, the road to Cuba's future must start at the same place: ending the U.S. blockade.

I can only hope that the fall of the embargo would lead to the Cuban people to a world where they no longer have to be so resilient. I hope it would resuscitate the project of Cuban socialism, which is in a fragile state. And I hope that ending the embargo would *not* also mean opening Cuba to being subsumed by American capitalism, turning it into just another place for profit extraction for the world's empires. That would be the most tragic possible ending for the revolutionary proj-

STILL PRESENT:
A photo of Fidel Castro surrounded by photos of schoolkids. The revolutionary leader died in 2016.

COLONIAL LEGACY: Visiting a former Spanish fort overlooking the Havana harbor.

PUBLIC ART: A sample of the mosaic tile work of the Havana-based artist Jose Fuster.

Continued on the next page

CUBA

Continued from previous page

ect that used a rejection of U.S. profiteering as its primary engine. But that is not my decision to make. It is a road Cubans will have to make for themselves, as they always have.

JOURNEY TO MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOME

I had the address of my grandparents' house where my mother and my grandmother both grew up, and where they lived before fleeing in 1967. There would be another family living there now. In those days, the government seized the houses and apartments that were abandoned by Cubans who fled the island and assigned other families to live in them, setting the monthly rent at 10% of the salary of one worker.

There was a group of men with well-maintained American classic cars that perched on the same street as the hotel, offering us rides every chance they got. One afternoon, I decided to take one of them up on it. He asked me where I wanted to go, no doubt expecting me to say Vieja Havana or some other touristy spot. "Santos Suarez," I said, the neighborhood where the house was, about three miles from the hotel. He looked at me quizzically. He said, "No one has ever asked me to take them to Santos Suarez before." I explained that I was Cuban-American, that my family left in the 1960s, and that I was trying to find my *abuela's* old house. His face softened. "Let's go then," he said.

Luis [name changed] has been a taxi driver in Havana for the past 10 years. I got into his 1950's Chevy, and he immediately sprang into action. He called his friend and jotted down some rough directions.

He drove down the grand avenue known as Paseo and through the Plaza de la Revolución, then on a road called Arroyo that took us right through central Havana. As we continued on, the Havana of the tourists gave way to the Havana of the everyday Cuban. It was absolutely bustling. It was just past 5 p.m., when people would be returning to their homes from work.

The sidewalks were lined with teenagers being loud and obnoxious together (Luis lamented how cell phones were killing youth culture in Cuba), kids crossing the street with their parents. People were bringing home groceries, cooking together in makeshift outdoor kitchens, talking to each other across building balconies. Luis pointed out places my mom and grandmother would have probably frequented, told me about the different families that lived in the neighborhood, and gave me the neighborhood gossip.

We crossed into the Havana municipality called El Cerro and things changed again. This was clearly one of the poorer parts of town. The road went from concrete to dirt, with big patches of puddles and rocks. The houses were smaller and most were in bad shape; some were nothing more than shacks. There is garbage piled up around some of the street corners, something Luis tells me is one of the greatest frustrations of Habaneros, especially in the city's more farflung districts. "Cuba is the only country in the world where you can visit the doctor for free but have to walk through human shit to get there," he tells me.

We get to talking about life in Cuba. He tells me he lives out in Cuba's countryside, where he grows and sells various fruits and vegetables, but he comes into Havana every day to drive a taxi. "Everyone in Cuba needs a side hustle," he says. "Salaries from the government are just not high enough." He told me life is hard in Cuba right now, that it's easy to feel hopeless. "Cubans don't need a lot to be happy; if we have a good job and can provide for our families we are happy. But we can't do that right now, it's very difficult." I brought up that I was in Cuba with a political group that was working to end the U.S. blockade. He tells me that that's good, but that a lot of Cubans were tired of hearing about the block-

ade. "There's a joke we Cubans have, when we stub our toes, we blame it on the blockade; when we cut ourselves cooking, we blame the blockade." He even told me about a conspiracy theory going around that the blockade is totally made up by the government. I assured him it was very much real.

Ironically, in the middle of this conversation, we came to an intersection with a giant mural on one of its walls that read "Solidaridad entre pueblos abajo el bloqueo" — Solidarity among people under the blockade. Another of the blockade's double-edged properties is that it is at once a policy meant to delegitimize the Cuban government, but it is also the Cuban government's biggest political tool. While its effects are visible everywhere, so is the government's propagandizing around it. Luis tells me about what Cubans call "el bloqueo interno," the internal blockade. "How is it possible," he asks me, not looking for an answer, "that in a country surrounded by water and with lots of fertile land there is a shortage of food?" I knew I could cite all the stats and figures, tell him about the difficulty of importing the farm equipment and fuel needed to harvest the land and the trucks needed to distribute the food, but I got the sense that it would not shake his fundamental, and ultimately righteous, anger with his government. When every day is focused on the survival of your family, there is little room for politics.

We made a left at the corner with the mural and Luis quickly rolled down his window and asked a passerby, "Is this Serrano Street?" The passerby said it was, so we continued down the road. This was it, the street my grandmother and mother lived on their whole lives in Cuba. Luis slowed down and we started looking at each house, looking for the house number. The houses in this neighborhood are bigger and in better condition — we are not in El Cerro anymore. About

in her mind's eye, in an unaltered and undamaged state, suspended in time and space. A conduit for happiness and her rage. Maybe it was better that way.

Luis got out of the car with me. He asked a neighborhood kid about who lived in this house. The kid replied, "Who wants to know?" Luis explained who I was and what I wanted. The kid, with an easy familiarity, went up to the house's open first floor window and yelled inside: "Manuel, someone is here to talk to you. Their grandma used to live here or something like that." We thanked him as he ran down the sidewalk. Soon thereafter, an older man came to the door. Luis explained to him who I was and that I wanted to photograph the house for my grandmother. The old man hesitantly agreed. Luis also asked if we could go inside to take pictures, but the man refused. I had heard stories of other people with Cuban heritage approaching their familial houses and being invited in for coffee; that was clearly not going to happen this time.

While Luis and the old man talked in Spanish, I took pictures from every imaginable angle. After about ten minutes, we were on our way back. Luis remarked about how good the house looked, and he told me the work must have been done before the pandemic. "Since then, a bag of cement costs about as much as a month's salary."

On the drive back, Luis points out various buildings, giving me a tour of sorts. Under the frustration we had talked so much about, I could sense a different emotion seeping through: pride.

I asked him if he had kids. He and his wife have twins, he replied. After years of struggling to have kids on their own, they were able to finally conceive using IVF. I looked at him and asked if the IVF treatments were covered by the Cuban

MY GRANDFATHER, THE LYNCHPIN OF MY FAMILY'S GRIEVANCE WITH THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT, WAS A COP UNDER THE PREVIOUS REGIME.

halfway down the block, we stopped at a house painted a bright blue with white trim. It looked to be two stories tall, and had a front porch with two beams holding up a balcony.

My mind flashes to an old photo of my mom, all of five years old, sitting on the porch of this house with her cousins. I got out of the car and looked up and down the street. The neighborhood had a suburban quality to it. The houses are some of the best-looking buildings I've seen in Cuba. They are all painted, some in vibrant greens and yellows. I can't help but think of my mom running up and down the streets as a kid, or of my grandmother walking on the sidewalks to and from school every day. I can't help but think how, had circumstances been different, this house would have probably been a major part of my life as well. I thought about my mom's writing on their departure:

"We left Cuba in 1967 with my mom and grandmother. But I do know how hard it was for mom and my grandma to be called all kinds of names by their neighbors, for my mom not being able to work because she did not partake in the rituals and things people in the workforce were forced to participate in, and many other things that scar a then 6-year-old forever and that shaped me into the person I am today. My mom, especially, was the one who was most affected by Castro's regime. She, and scores of decent, hardworking citizens had to stand in long lines to be able to bring food, as little as the regime deemed fit, to the table."

For my family, this house is a resting place of memory. Some are joyful, some sorrowful, and many a mix of both. Because of the weight of those memories, my grandmother had no idea I was in Cuba, or that I was here, looking at what is probably the single most important place in the world for her. This was a place that for the rest of her life will remain

healthcare system. Outside of paying for a few of the necessary vaccines that had to be imported, he explained, the IVF treatments themselves were done free of charge. For a moment, I couldn't speak; I was totally blown away. I told him about the many people I know in the US who wish they could try IVF but cannot afford it. I told him of people I know who had tried IVF, and despite it being unsuccessful would probably be paying for it for the rest of their lives. In a moment I will never forget that I think perfectly sums up the great hope and heartbreak of Cuba, Luis turned to me and said, "I was able to conceive them, but I have trouble making sure there's enough food for them every day."

LA LISA: NEIGHBORHOOD IN TRANSFORMATION

Our last official stop of the trip was perhaps the most all-encompassing. We were driven to Havana's far southwestern edge to a neighborhood called La Lisa. What made this place special was that not that long ago, it was not a neighborhood. Over the past several years, this once vacant lot has been transformed by Cuba's Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), into a community that by all appearances was thriving. There was new housing being built out of cinder and cement. There was a school, a restaurant, a small farm, and a small general store. When we arrived in the late afternoon, the basketball courts, playground, and streets were overflowing with kids of all ages, seemingly engaged in some kind of afterschool program. This was not just a neighborhood, but a state-funded intentional community being constructed to

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LORNA PEREZ

CUBA

Continued from page 12

house the scientists that worked at nearby facilities and their families.

Established a few months after the revolution, the CDRs are a dense network of neighborhood committees across Cuba. Growing up, I only heard about these committees as boogymen — a network of spies that would round you up if you dared speak against the government. It was a CDR that investigated my grandfather and arrested him for “counter-revolutionary activity.”

My grandfather, the lynchpin of my family’s grievance with the Cuban government, was a cop under the previous president, Fulgencio Batista. He did not support the revolution, and was in fact working to undermine it. After Castro took power, he lost his job as a cop and he got a job at La Tropical, a brewery where his dad had worked. In my father’s words:

“That’s where the sabotage charge comes in. He was accused of jamming the machines that capped the bottles, causing a disruption to the production of beer. These machines were very old because they were the very same machinery that were in the industries and businesses that were nationalized, like Bacardi, Coca Cola, etc. The machines were breaking down everyday even before he started working there but it was an excuse to put him away. You see, what he actually did and they couldn’t prove was that he clandestinely collected money for the families of the prisoners already in jail to help them survive because the system would cut them off to further hurt the ‘contra revolucionarios.’”

From an objective distance, I can see an interpretation of what my grandfather did as funneling money to counter-revolutionaries, of my grandfather as part of the resistance to the revolution. I can see the need for defending the newly born revolution from being smothered by right-wing reaction, as has happened so many times in history. But down in my gut, I cannot shake off the imprisonment of a member of my family so easily, especially after the way it haunted my grandmother and it still haunts my father and his brothers to this day.

I was always told that the CDRs were a malevolent wing of the Cuban government, but now I was entering a thriving community they were building. A place they were creating from nothing to house people, to enrich the lives of kids. I wrestled with this the entire time we were in La Lisa, a duality that was inescapable and encapsulating really of my entire experience in Cuba.

I came to Cuba with the mission of untangling that messy web of history, of getting to the bottom of it once and for all. What I realized in La Lisa is that all I can do is add new threads. I have to use the threads of the past; the grief, the grievance, the trauma, the hurt; I have to take the social solidarity, collective reliance, the conscientious building of a new type of society; I have to take the poverty, the resilience, the desperation; I have to take all of it and weave it together. I had to pull together a new, personal understanding of my homeland—that-could-have-been.

HOMELAND OR DEATH

We undoubtedly had an abnormally luxurious experience of Cuba. We were driven around in a large air-conditioned bus. We had ample access to food and water. Our hotel was sleek and modern, with a rooftop pool, a gym, and a full bar at our disposal. In terms of what we experienced, we got the “party line” on how Cuba functions, which was fascinating in its own right and is not a perspective I feel should be automatically dismissed. In fact, every single government official we

spoke to, from the president on down, acknowledged Cuba’s difficult situation and the need to adapt in order to meet the moment. In any other country I would take anything a government official tells me with critical skepticism, and I do the same for Cuba. You will hear it repeated often in the United States that everything wrong with Cuba is the fault of communism or of their corrupt government. I’m sure there’s corruption, I’m sure there’s incompetence, I’m sure that Cuba’s government is plagued with the same problems that all governments have. But even without taking every single one of their claims at face value, it is clear that the dire situation in Cuba right now cannot be laid only at the Cuban government’s feet.

Whatever Cuba’s problems are, they are unambiguously exacerbated by the fact that they are under economic siege, the target of a policy that is meant to deliberately starve them. Like I often retort to my parents, if all of Cuba’s problems are the fault of its government, why does our government continue to uphold a brutal economic blockade? If communism is so inherently flawed, why does our government feel the need to apply so many external pressures? I am partial to the answer Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío gave us: the example of Cuba simply cannot be allowed to succeed.

Still, After taking in with my own eyes the way things are experienced on the ground in Cuba — I can’t help but sympathize with the people’s increasing lack of faith in their government. They have been asked over and over again to sacrifice for their country, and they are getting increasingly little in return. Cuba’s motto, “Patria ó Muerte” (homeland or death), at one time a rally cry for the country’s revolutionary ambitions, today feels more like an ultimatum.

When it came time to leave our hotel and return to the airport, we doubled back along the same route that we took when we first arrived. I was seeing the same murals, the same buildings, the same crowded bus stops, but it all had a different context now, a depth of understanding I didn’t have before.

As we boarded our flight, the pilot announced that our plane was Brazilian-made, a legal shield against US sanction law which says nothing made with more than 10% U.S. components can be imported to Cuba. I found my seat and we taxied slowly past Cubana Airlines planes that sat in front of crumbling old aircraft hangers. Several of the planes had moss and vines growing over them, relics of a better time lined up to see us off. As we took to the skies, Cuba’s lush green dissipated and shrank into the distance. I couldn’t help but feel like I was leaving home to come home.

For a longer version of this article, go to www.bit.ly/cubadiaries.

HEALTH CARE

FOR ALL: Cuba provides free health care for all its citizens, though it is hobbled by U.S. economic sanctions that restrict access to key medical supplies.

FIGHTING MACHISMO:

Mariela Castro, director of the National Center for Sex Education, which has championed LGBTQ rights. She is the daughter of former Cuban President Raul Castro.

PARADISE LOST:

The family home in Havana that the author’s mother and grandparents fled in 1967 to emigrate to Miami.



LORNA PEREZ



DANNY VALDES

Impact of the War on Gaza on Health Care and Human Rights

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Speaker:
Dr. Alice Rothchild

Organized by Brooklyn For Peace
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UPCOMING EVENTS

The Fall and Rise of American Finance

Sat, February 10 @ 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM • The People's Forum, 320 West 37th Street, New York, NY

Stephen Maher and Scott Aquanno, authors of *The Fall and Rise of American Finance: From J.P. Morgan to Blackrock*, insist that financialization has not implied the hollowing out of the "real" economy, the decline of capitalism, or the retreat of the state. Rather, it has served to intensify competitive discipline to maximize profits and the exploitation of labor occurred with the support of an increasingly authoritarian state. In-person event at The People's Forum in NYC – with online access available as well.

If We Burn: Mass Protest and Political Strategy for the 21st Century

Online reading group starts Tue, February 20 @ 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Why has the worldwide wave of mass protest in the decade of the 2010s given way to such a strong tide of reaction? And even with that counter-trend, what accounts for what some have called the Marxist revival, a new trend of theorizing and strategizing on the left. Join us to read and reflect on what went right in the last decade, what new organizing now reflects its legacy, and what remains unfulfilled.

Palestine: Celebrating 75 Years of Literature

Online reading group starts Thu, February 22 @ 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Read a selection of Palestinian fiction, poetry, and related literature with the MEP's Literature Reading Group. The ongoing catastrophe in the Middle East breaks our hearts daily. As part of the MEP's mission to explore creative political resistance to oppression, we will read several novels and poems by prominent and emerging Palestinian writers investigating themes since 1947 of armed resistance, class, the refugee experience, and women's experience of conflict.

Marx for Cats with Leigh Claire La Berge

Online book event Sat, February 24 @ 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

"All history is the history of cat struggle." In *"Marx for Cats: A Radical Bestiary"*, our guest speaker Leigh Clare La Berge follows feline footprints through Western economic history to reveal an animality at the heart of Marxism. By asking what humans and animals owe each other in a moment of ecological crisis, La Berge joins current debates about the need for and possibility of eco-socialism.

The Marxist Education Project is an independent nonprofit association dedicated to the political self-education of working-class and community activists. It is not part of nor financially supported by any other organization.

TO LEARN MORE AND REGISTER

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MIGRANT FAMILY

Continued from Page 6

‘HER FAMILY IS MY FAMILY’

Allan and his family moved in with Laura and her two small cats in mid-September 2023. It hasn’t been all roses since then; one of the biggest stresses has been trying to get Allan and Elba’s working papers. But they couldn’t get those papers until their asylum claims were processed.

“These legal service agencies,” Laura said back in October, “are so backed up that they’re on waiting lists... just to get an appointment to apply for political asylum.” In the meantime, they were at least able to enroll Zoe and Hector in a nearby bilingual school, where lessons alternate every other day between Spanish and English instruction.

At first, many of Laura’s friends and neighbors couldn’t believe she invited four strangers to live in her small apartment. However, after the family was settled in, her friends became instrumental to their success. Allan and Elba learned about which social and legal services to utilize through a neighbor who works as a social worker. Other neighbors gave the family clothes for the children. Laura’s friends offered Allan and Elba odd jobs, so they could earn some cash. At Christmas time, those friends also bought Zoe and Hector gifts.

“Different people have been helping out in amazing ways,” Laura said.

Despite the harassment they may have faced in Honduras, Allan, Elba and the kids miss their home country. New York City is nice, they said, but obviously none of the tall buildings could ever compare to the family members they left behind.

“I left my family there,” Elba said. “I feel that. Even though we came here for better opportunities, I feel that.”

One particularly difficult week came in October, when Allan’s father was struck by a car back in Honduras and died. Unable to return home, he couldn’t attend the funeral or grieve alongside his surviving family.

Still, despite the initial hesitation and some painful moments along the way, neither Laura nor the family regret their coming to the city — and none of it would have happened if not for the strength of Laura and Elda’s friendship.

“Out of all her children, Allan is the one who most resembles Elda,” Laura reflected. “Sometimes I look at him and it makes me happy to see his mother’s face.” Laura said she also recognizes

in Allan his mother’s generosity, her warmth and her willingness to help out whenever it’s needed.

Laura also shared her thoughts on the “refugee crisis” in the city as a whole, though she prefers not to call it that. “This is a refugee opportunity,” she said. “It is an opportunity for our country to expand and grow, for us to make new friends, and to have more workers to contribute to the economic success of all.”

In mid-January, the family finally received their social security numbers and Allan and Elba are expecting their working papers any day now. Since October, Laura and the family have visited one friend upstate for a few days and one in Pennsylvania, investigating opportunities for work outside of the city. Over the last few months, it’s become more and more clear that New York is just too expensive for them. Laura hopes they won’t go too far, though, because Allan, Elba, Zoe and Hector have become part of her family.

MANY OF LAURA’S FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS COULDN’T BELIEVE SHE INVITED FOUR STRANGERS TO LIVE IN HER SMALL APARTMENT.

“One of the reasons Elda was hesitating to go back to Honduras [before she died] was she didn’t want to leave me alone,” Laura said. “I think she would be happy to know that my relationship with her has continued through her family.”



PAUL FRANGIPANE

CUNY LAYOFFS

FACULTY FIRINGS SPARK OUTRAGE

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

The firing of 26 full-time faculty at CUNY-Queens College has sparked outrage and concern that an era of deepening austerity could take hold at the City University of New York.

"A lot of us here are angry. But anger doesn't actually describe it; I'd go with furious," said Professor David Gerwin, chair of Queens College's Department of Education, who spoke at a campus rally on Jan. 25 as students returned for the first day of the spring semester.

The 26 fired faculty members were lecturers who were slated to teach for the full academic year. Instead, they learned a couple of weeks before the new semester that they had been dismissed. For some, it also meant the loss of their health insurance.

"Everything was going well. My classes were over-tallied with long wait lists," said Ash Marinaccio, a lecturer in the Media Studies Department who was let go.

In Marinaccio's case, she was subsequently rehired as a part-time adjunct teaching the same classes for less pay and stingier benefits.

"It was really important to me to be able to finish with my students, some of whom I've had for four or five semesters," Marinaccio said.

Many of the fired professors had to scramble to find work elsewhere. The cancellation of their classes has left students reeling as well as they try to find the courses they need to complete their studies.

"I came here because Queens College has a very robust arts department and sculpture department. And they're the only place in Queens where you can do Bronze casting. It's crazy that the person who was holding that down has been fired," said Brandon King, a graduate student in the Arts Department at Queens College.

QUEENS COLLEGE: Students and faculty protest on the first day of the spring semester.

CUNY encompasses 18 undergraduate colleges and seven graduate schools spread across the five boroughs. Founded in 1849 to serve "the children of the whole people," CUNY was tuition free until 1976. CUNY is still a relative bargain and is the first rung on the ladder to the middle class for many immigrant and working-class students. However, CUNY's total enrollment plummeted by 17% from roughly 271,000 in 2019–20 to about 226,000 in 2022–23 before seeing a slight uptick in the past year.

Karen Weingarten, the faculty union representative at Queens College, says a lack of academic advisors and other support staff contributes to the declining enrollment as students drop out before finishing their coursework.

"CUNY has told the colleges that for every three people who leave or retire, they can only hire one person," Weingarten told *The Independent*.

In 2023, West Virginia University made national headlines when it closed 28 academic departments at its flagship campus. Weingarten's partner teaches at New Jersey City University which saw a similar situation unfold last year when 97 academic programs were eliminated along with the economics, ESL and physics departments.

"As we see less and less support for public institutions like CUNY, I worry that a well-rounded higher educational experience is something only a small number of elite students will have," Weingarten said.

The eviscerating of both WVU and NJU was carried out with the help of the RPK Group, a consulting firm that specializes in restructuring universities. It lists CUNY as one of its clients. The Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents 30,000 faculty and staff at CUNY, has filed a Freedom of Information request demanding that CUNY hand over all documents pertaining to its relationship with RPK Group. To date, CUNY hasn't released any information and insists it is not a client of RPK.

Lane Dibler contributed reporting to this article.

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

UNION DENSITY DIPS SLIGHTLY

The number of union members in the United States increased by 139,000 in 2023 to a total of 14.4 million, but their share of the workforce fell slightly, from 10.1% to 10%, the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Jan. 23. The union membership rate among public-sector workers dipped from 33.1% to 32.5% but continued to be more than five times the 6% rate among private-sector workers. Membership, however, rose by more than 20% in South Carolina, Mississippi and Virginia, three of the nation's least-unionized states, and by 229,000 among workers under 45. "These statistics don't capture the number of workers who want to join unions," the Economic Policy Institute noted. "Evidence suggests that in 2023, more than 60 million workers wanted to join a union but couldn't do so." The group urged legislation to "reform a broken system that allows employers to drag their feet on recognizing employee-supported unions and negotiating in good faith."

UAW GEARS UP TO UNIONIZE SOUTHERN AUTO FACTORIES

More than 10,000 workers at 13 auto plants in the South have signed union cards, the United Auto Workers announced Jan. 29. More than half the workers at Volkswagen's plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., have signed on, and more than 30% have at two Alabama factories, Hyundai in Montgomery and Mercedes in Vance. The UAW launched an organizing drive last November in a bid to crack the South, where it has lost several major campaigns over the last decade and where there are no states where more than 10% of workers are represented by a union. "All I can tell my people to do is be bold and intentional. Just like the leaders of the civil-rights movement, we're linking together one by one," Quichelle Liggins, a 12-year quality inspector at Hyundai, told *Labor Notes*. The Mercedes workers are taking a similar homegrown approach, based on finding "talkers" respected by their coworkers.

UNION READY?: An autoworker at a Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

NLRB SAYS DARTMOUTH BASKETBALL TEAM CAN VOTE ON UNION

The National Labor Relations Board ruled Feb. 5 that players on the Dartmouth College men's basketball team can vote on whether to have a union. Boston regional director Laura A. Sacks says they do because the New Hampshire school "has the right to control the work performed" by the players, and they "perform that work in exchange for compensation."

"We believe that other athletes will recognize the opportunities this ruling presents and will be inspired to follow suit," players Cade Haskins and Romeo Myrthil said in a statement. All 15 team members signed a petition to join Service Employees International Union Local 560 last fall. Dartmouth officials insist that players are students, not employees, and are planning to appeal the ruling to the NLRB's national board. In 2015, the board declined to rule on whether college athletes, who can bring in a lot of revenue for their schools, have the rights of employees.

TRANSIT RETIREES TRY TO DERAIL MEDICARE ADVANTAGE

When Transport Workers Union Local 100 signed a contract with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority last year, it quietly deleted its 22,000 retired workers' option to have traditional Medicare, forcing them to enroll in private Medicare Advantage plans. Now, a group of retirees is suing to get their traditional Medicare back. Like the city workers who won a similar case last year, the retired transport workers argue that Medicare Advantage illegally diminishes the health-care benefits they were promised, because many medical providers don't take the plan, drug prices are higher, and it often requires prior authorization for medical procedures. "Somebody behind a desk tells you whether you need a stent in your heart or your legs need to be fixed," Lloyd Archer, a retired bus operator and former Local 100 official who is lead plaintiff in the case, told a meeting in January. A hearing on the suit is scheduled for mid-March.

ERIK SCHNEITZ



ISRAEL'S DAY IN COURT

BY MARJORIE COHN

What comes next, now that the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the World Court, has handed down its near-unanimous ruling that South Africa presented a “plausible” case that Israel was violating the Genocide Convention?

The Jan. 26 provisional ruling — which was a landmark victory for the Palestinian people and indeed for international law itself — now goes to the United Nations Security Council for enforcement. It is within the Security Council’s purview to order economic or trade sanctions, arms embargoes, travel bans, or even military force to thwart Israel.

But in the likely event that the United States vetoes enforcement measures from the Security Council, the UN General Assembly can still act independently in materially-significant ways.

The ICJ’s final decision in this case could take several years. Given the urgency of the mass death and humanitarian crisis currently unfolding, the Court has in the meantime ordered six “provisional measures” to protect the Palestinians in Gaza from genocidal acts while it finishes considering the merits of the case.

In its ruling, the Court said it is “acutely aware of the extent of the human tragedy that is unfolding in the region and is deeply concerned about the continuing loss of life and human suffering.” It described the civilian population in Gaza as “extremely vulnerable,” noting “tens of thousands of deaths and injuries and the destruction of homes, schools, medical facilities and other vital infrastructure, as well as displacement on a massive scale.” The Court added that the “operation is ongoing” and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had stated it “will take many more long months.”

“At present, many Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have no access to the most basic foodstuffs, potable water, electricity, essential medicines or heating,” the Court noted.

The ICJ ordered Israel not to commit genocidal acts against Palestinians in Gaza immediately, even as the Court continues its slow process of officially considering the merits of the genocide case. It concluded that “the catastrophic humanitarian situation” in Gaza “is at serious risk of deteriorating further before the Court renders its final judgment.” Moreover, it said the Palestinians’ right to be protected against genocidal acts and South Africa’s right (as a party to the Genocide Convention) to ensure Israel’s compliance with the convention could be safeguarded by provisional measures. They are:

1. Israel shall take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all genocidal acts, particularly (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or

in part; and (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

2. Israel shall ensure with immediate effect that its military does not commit any acts described in point 1 above.
3. Israel shall take all measures within its power to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide.
4. Israel shall take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in Gaza.
5. Israel shall take effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence.
6. Israel shall submit a report to the Court on all measures taken to give effect to this Order within one month from the date of this Order.

The ICJ affirmed that “all parties to the conflict in the Gaza Strip are bound by international humanitarian law.” It said it is “gravely concerned about the fate of the hostages abducted during the attack in Israel on 7 October 2023 and held since then by Hamas and other armed groups” and called for “their immediate and unconditional release.”

Every vote on the provisional measures either came out 15-2 or 16-1, with Israel and at times Uganda voting “No.”

If the United States vetoes enforcement actions via the Security Council, the General Assembly can convene under Uniting for Peace, a resolution it passed to bypass the Soviet Union’s veto during the Korean War (1950–53). The General Assembly can recommend that its member states impose arms and trade embargoes on Israel and organize a military force to intervene in Gaza. It can also suspend Israel from its ranks. These decisions would require a vote of two-thirds of the Assembly’s 193 member states.

“A strong resolution there could call for specific legal, economic, political, diplomatic, consular, organizational and other measures. And individual states and regional orgs should act as well, as a matter of legal duty under the convention and under the Charter,” says Craig Mokhiber, former director of the New York Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who resigned in 2023 because the UN was not moving to end what he called Israel’s “textbook case of genocide.”

Although the ICJ did not order that Israel “immediately suspend its military operations” in Gaza, as requested by South Africa, the provisional measures it did order effectively require a ceasefire. The Court orders forbid the genocidal killing of Palestinians and mandate that Israel

GENOCIDE JOE: Roughly 100 Jewish New Yorkers were arrested on Feb. 7 for sitting in the street outside an Upper East Side re-election fundraiser attended by President Biden.

allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, which cannot be accomplished without a ceasefire.

“How do you provide aid and water without a ceasefire? If you read the order, by implication a ceasefire must happen,” South African Foreign Affairs Minister Naledi Pandor said in a statement to the press following the ruling.

Former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Richard Falk said the decision “marks the greatest moment in the history of the [court],” because “it strengthens the claims of international law to be respected by all sovereign states — not just some.”

Not surprisingly, Israel rejected the decision of the World Court. Netanyahu called it “outrageous” and characterized the charges of genocide against Israel as “unfounded.”

And the same day the ICJ ruled that Israel must allow humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza, Israel charged that 12 staff members of the UN Relief and Works Agency were involved in the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas. UNRWA fired nine of the suspected offenders and is investigating two of them, and one is dead. Nevertheless, the United States and several of its allies (which provide 60% of UNRWA’s funding) immediately suspended funds to the 13,000-employee agency on which nearly all Palestinians in Gaza depend for survival, including food and shelter.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in a statement, “The abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members must have consequences, but the tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA, many in some of the most dangerous situations for humanitarian workers, should not be penalized. The dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met.”

Defunding humanitarian aid to the Palestinians under siege in Gaza is one of the ways the United States is accelerating Israel’s genocide.

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and a member of the national advisory boards of Assange Defense and Veterans For Peace. A longer version of this article originally appeared at Truthout.org.

A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

Israelism
DIRECTED BY ERIC AXELMAN & SAM EILEATSEN
EDITED BY TONY HALE
TIKKUN OLAM PRODUCTION, 2023, 84 MINUTES

By Eleanor J. Bader

Israelism, an award-winning, full-length documentary film, zeroes in on the ways American Jewish youth is inculcated to uncritically support the Jewish homeland. From Jewish day schools to summer camps, to free 10-day Birthright trips to Israel, the film explores the multiple ways that Jewish institutions instill a belief that religious observance and Zionism are two sides of the same sparkly coin.

The film centers on two activists. The first, Simone Zimmerman, repeatedly visited Israel as a child and teenager. Over time, she began to wonder why she never met any Palestinians and why she was discouraged from exploring the West Bank and Gaza. “What is so horrifying they can’t let me see it?” she asked herself.

An eventual visit to these areas, Zimmerman tells the filmmakers, was eye-opening and led to deep investigation to separate fact from fiction. She describes her research into the founding of Israel and its history and development since 1948 as emotionally cataclysmic and that by 2014, she knew she needed to act. The result was the creation of the organization IfNotNow.

Since Oct. 7, the group has played a pivotal role in opposing the brutality of the Israeli military in Gaza. While their mission has taken on increased urgency since the fall, IfNotNow’s goals have always been far-reaching. According to its website, over the past decade IfNotNow has continually mobilized progressive Jews to oppose “U.S. support for Israel’s apartheid system” and has supported social justice and equality for Palestinians.

The second activist profiled is Eitan (his surname not revealed), a young man who joined the Israeli military after graduating from an Atlanta high school and who later found himself ashamed of his complicity in abusing, denigrating and oppressing Palestinians in the West Bank.

The pair offer an articulate denunciation of the pervasive conflation between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism. What’s more, they address the urgent need to combat domestic and international white-supremacist movements that are actively promoting anti-Jewish hate.

The film also introduces a range of other voices, both Jewish and Palestinian. Among the Jewish interviewees, viewers meet Jacqui Schulefand, director of engagement at the University of Connecticut’s chapter of Hillel, the largest Jewish college-campus organization in the world, and Abraham Foxman, emeritus director of the Anti-Defamation League, each of whom is an unabashed supporter of Israel. Others, such as Jeremy Ben-Ami, President of the nonprofit liberal advocacy group J Street, express criticism of Netanyahu and the current Israeli government but do not oppose Zionism itself.

PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVE

The film also includes Baha Hilo, a Palestinian tour guide who grew up in Bethlehem, and Sami Awad, executive director of the Holy Land Trust, a global peace organization. In one of the film’s most moving segments, Awad talks about visiting Auschwitz and grappling with the “inherited trauma” in the Jewish community, something he says makes the desire for safety and security understandable, even reasonable.

That said, Awad stresses that these legitimate needs should not come at the expense of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, he bristles at Israeli characterizations of Palestinians as less than human, something he believes allows mistreatment and bigotry to flourish.

“There is something deeply wrong here,” Zimmerman tells the filmmakers. “We’ve been told that the only way Jews can be safe is if Palestinians are not safe. It’s a lie.”

Not surprisingly, as *Israelism* unfolds, it showcases a litany of horrors — the demolition of Palestinian homes; physical and psychological abuse at checkpoints by Israeli soldiers; and the denial of adequate food, water and electricity in areas that West Bank settlers have taken as their own. Nonetheless, the film is not relentlessly grim.

“There can be no liberation with occupation,” peace activists repeat time after time at demonstrations and sit-ins depicted throughout the film.

Their actions speak loudly. In fact, by periodically disrupting the everyday operations of the Anti-Defamation League, Birthright and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), these Jewish activists have put Zionist entities on notice that dissent is alive and well in their community.

Zimmerman calls this a “tipping point” moment and stresses that IfNotNow and other Jewish groups will

continue to support the Palestinian community and to work to promote the teaching of the 1948 Nakba and its ongoing impact. They’ll also oppose, she says, the ethnic cleansing at the heart of Israel’s creation and endless warmongering.

Zimmerman knows that IfNotNow, alongside Jewish Voice for Peace, T’Ruah, and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, are up against mighty and well-heeled foes.

While I wish the documentary looked into the role of Christians United for Israel in galvanizing pro-Israel views in the evangelical and fundamentalist communities, this does not detract from *Israelism*’s power and importance. All told, the film is a must-see for progressives — Jewish and otherwise — who want to understand how Zionism is perpetuated and how it can be countered.



COURTESY

THU FEB 29
7-10PM

BORN IN GAZA

Follow the story of 10 Palestinian children who endured the 2014 Israel assault on Gaza as they move forward with their lives.

Discussion afterwards. Panelists TBA.

SAT MARCH 23
7-10PM

ISRAELISM

Two young Jewish-Americans go from being uncritical supporters of Israel to fierce anti-Zionist activists after encountering the brutal apartheid reality that Palestinians live under.

Discussion afterwards. Panelists will include Esther Farmer of Jewish Voice for Peace, Alex Kane of Jewish Currents and additional participants TBA.

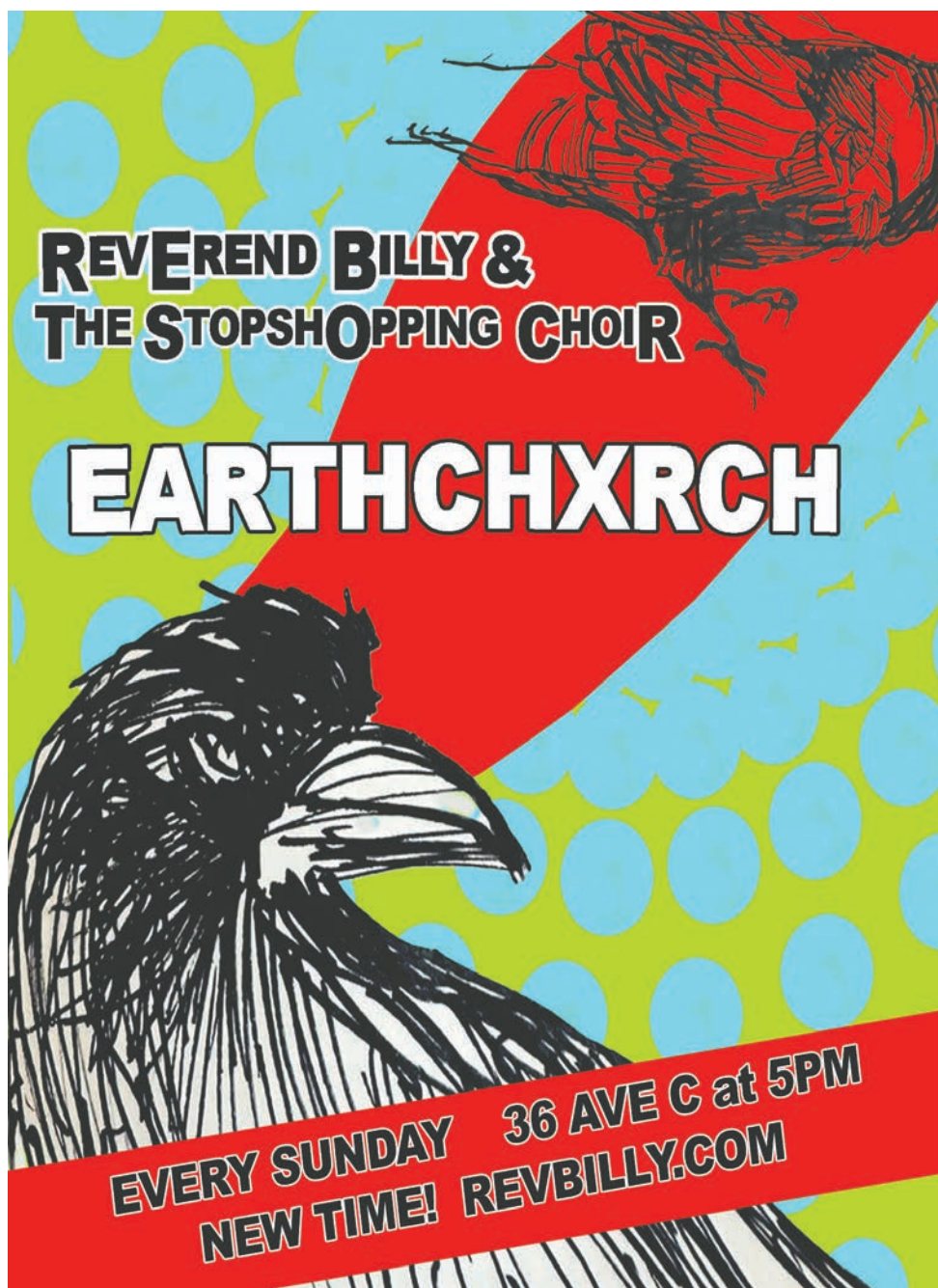
Both events are fundraisers for
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Theater for the New City

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LEAVES by VICTOR VAUBAN JÚNIOR
FEBRUARY 1- FEBRUARY 18 THURS. to SAT. @ 7:45PM, SUN
@2:45PM

**GOOD SOLDIER SVEJK AND HIS FORTUNES IN THE FIRST
WORLD WAR** by VIT HOREJS
FEBRUARY 1- FEBRUARY 18 THURS. to SAT. @ 8PM, SUN @3PM

THE BOY WHO LISTENED TO PAINTINGS
by DEAN KOSTOS & PAUL KIRBY
FEBRUARY 1- FEBRUARY 18 THURS. to SAT. @ 8PM, SUN @3PM

THE MIRACLE by ALBERTO FERRERAS
FEBRUARY 8- FEBRUARY 25 THURS. to SAT. @ 8PM, SUN @3PM

LOVE N' COURAGE: TNC'S ANNUAL BENEFIT
FEBRUARY 12 @ 6PM, @ THE PLAYERS CLUB

THE FRANKENSTEIN PROJECT
FEBRUARY 22- MARCH 10 THURS. & FRI. 8PM,
SAT. & SUN @3PM



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